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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/NB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/11/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [SCUL](#) [DA](#)

SUBJECT: DENMARK STRUGGLES WITH IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION

REF: A. COPENHAGEN 0146

[1](#)B. COPENHAGEN 0011Classified By: Counselor for Political and Economic Affairs
Blair Hall, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The integration of Muslims and other ethnic minorities remains one of the most pressing political and social issues in Denmark. The government increasingly has focused attention on this issue, including passing legislation to assist newly arrived immigrants and introducing action plans promoting integration and diversity, but the results have been disappointing. The ethnic immigrant community in Denmark is experiencing significantly higher crime rates, higher rates of unemployment and lower education levels than the general Danish population. Such results lead critics to question the effectiveness of the Government's integration policies and suggest that the government is actually pursuing a misguided and self-defeating policy of assimilation. Muslim community leaders believe that integration is hindered by a combination of ineffective government efforts, societal discrimination as well as the determination of some Muslims to distance themselves from Danish society. Finding a successful formula for integration is an ongoing imperative against a backdrop of simmering frustration among Denmark's estimated 180,000 Muslims. End Summary.

Government Integration Policies

[1](#)2. (U) Over the past several years the Danish government actively has promoted integration through legislation and action plans. Its efforts have produced only mixed results. The current integration laws were enacted in 1999 to assist newly arrived immigrants, refugees, and accepted asylum seekers. This legislation directs municipalities to enroll newly arrived immigrants into a three-year introduction program which consists of language training, job training/placement, short term education and housing assistance. The legislation contains financial incentives to municipalities for each individual who becomes gainfully

employed for at least six months, and for successful completion of a Danish language program.

¶3. (U) The Government is also tracking the effectiveness of its integration laws. In March 2005, the Ministry of Integration published a report evaluating the efforts of Denmark's municipalities to implement Denmark's integration laws from 1999-2003. The report indicated that municipalities made progress during the first four years since the law was enacted, but also found that not all aspects of the integration law uniformly are being met. Newly appointed Minister of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs Rikke Hvilshj urged local politicians and public sector managers to make full implementation of the integration law a top priority.

¶4. (U) In 2003, the Government introduced the Action Plan to Promote Equal Treatment and Diversity and to Combat Racism. This Action Plan focuses on increasing knowledge about discrimination and racism in Denmark, proposes initiatives to increase access for ethnic and other minorities into higher education programs and the labor market, and seeks increased tolerance of diversity through public debate and dialogue. The Government also initiated an Action Plan for 2003-2005 on Forced, Quasi-Forced, and Arranged Marriages. The Action Plan on Forced Marriages contains initiatives aimed not only at preventing forced marriages but also improving integration and gender equality, and promoting the values of free choice and personal freedom. In 2003, the Government, through a joint effort by the Ministries of Integration, Employment, Social Affairs and Gender Equality, Culture, and Education, published its Vision and Strategies for Improved Integration. The report concluded that the main goals of integration policy for the near future should be: a coherent and open democratic society, access for minorities to education and training, and access to the labor market.

¶5. (C) The Government reaffirmed its commitment to pursuing and promoting its integration policies during the national election campaign in February. The coalition center right Government (successfully reelected to a four-year term) attempted to steer voters away from the issue of immigration by claiming that it had delivered on its campaign promise in 2001 to tighten immigration laws and asylum policy. Indeed, Denmark enacted some of Europe's strictest immigration laws in 2002. Instead, the government parties focused on promoting its new integration policies intended to address the disproportionately high crime rate and unemployment among ethnic minorities. For example, the government vowed to place 25,000 ethnic minorities into the work force by 2010. Post-election, the government unveiled a proposal in which ethnic minorities with limited language and education skills hired by the state could be paid 80% of the prevailing minimum wage, and be directed to devote 20% of their time (unpaid) to job training and improving their general qualifications.

Melting Pot or Assembly Line?

¶6. (C) Despite all of the Government efforts, integration remains a mounting challenge for Danish institutions and society. Frequent reports by the media highlight disproportionately high crime rates, unemployment, and school drop-out rates. For example, according to a Danish study completed in December 2004, criminal activity is 43 percent higher for non-Western background males than the average for all males in the population. In Copenhagen 82 percent of youths arraigned in court in 2004 were members of ethnic minority groups. According to Denmark's National Statistical authority, the national unemployment in Denmark in 2004 was 6.4 %, while the rate for ethnic minorities was 19.1%. The 2004 annual report by the Ministry of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration on immigrants documented that the overall enrollment rate among 16-19 year olds in Denmark in either secondary education or vocational training is 74%, but among ethnic minorities the enrollment rate is only 49%.

Integration Minister Hvilshj acknowledged in a recent lunch meeting at the Embassy that one of the biggest challenges facing the Government is stopping the flow of educated immigrants from leaving Denmark for countries such as the U.S., UK and Canada. The remaining population of immigrants tends to be less educated and has a more difficult time with the integration process.

¶7. (C) Some critics of the Government's integration policies suggest that their ineffectiveness is due to policies geared towards assimilation rather than integration. Leaders of the Muslim community have claimed in meetings with poloffs that there is no room for, and more importantly no political will to develop, cultural pluralism in Denmark. Tellingly, a senior advisor to Integration Minister Hvilshj commented during the recent lunch meeting at the Embassy that "we want them (immigrants) to think like Danes." Despite being born in Denmark, the children and even grandchildren of immigrants are widely referred to as "New Danes." Muslim community leaders lament that their communities are confronted with the widespread assumptions that integration is achieved only via complete assimilation and that cultural pluralism is undesirable in a small country like Denmark. Sensationalist Danish media coverage of Denmark's Muslim minorities only aggravates the cultural divide. Muslim leaders further state that assimilation policies are doomed to failure and will result in growing dissatisfaction and resentment between "New" and "Old" Danes.

Difficulties with the Integration Process

¶8. (C) The Muslim community leaders with whom emboffs have met invariably complain that the integration process here is particularly difficult for Muslims. They generally dismiss as superficial the government's action plans aimed at promoting integration into Danish society. Sukru Ertosun, Chairman of the Integration Ministry's Council for Ethnic Minorities told us that the government has consistently ignored the advice of his 14-member council while tightening Danish immigration law and asylum policy. Our Muslim contacts generally characterize the Prime Minister's much-publicized November 30, 2004, lunch with representatives of immigrant communities as a public display of tolerance that lacked substantive follow-up after the cameras were turned off. Additionally, Muslim community leaders claim that the government is steering NGO funding aimed at improving integration toward "pet" issues like combating forced marriages at the expense of programs aimed at combating discrimination or promoting cultural diversity.

¶9. (SBU) Embassy's Muslim contacts also note that integration is hindered by the subtle discrimination Muslims face on a daily basis. While all agree that the basic needs of Muslims are ensured by the generous cradle-to-grave Danish welfare state, subtle discrimination prevents Muslims in Denmark from "getting ahead." Pressed for details, these contacts highlight difficulties community members have in finding desirable housing or employment if they speak accented Danish or have a Middle Eastern last name. Where some Danish politicians see self-created ghettos, our Muslims contacts counter that ethnically dominated neighborhoods offer the most accessible housing opportunities. Referring to job discrimination, one contact joked that Copenhagen has the best educated taxi drivers in the world.

¶10. (SBU) Other examples of discrimination cited by our Muslim interlocutors:

- The Islamic Faith Society has been trying to secure permission to found a Muslim cemetery in Copenhagen for the last several years and only now appears to have won a green light.
- The Copenhagen Islamic Culture Center complains that it was denied permission to build a mosque on existing Culture Center property (but was allowed to renovate its more discrete library for prayer services).
- The Danish media recently reported that ethnic minorities

were routinely being denied entry into several popular Copenhagen nightclubs.

-- Vandals destroyed about 50 gravestones with Arabic writing at a Copenhagen cemetery in mid-January; similar vandalism took place at the same cemetery in 2001.

¶11. (C) Muslim community leaders also privately concede that many Muslims share responsibility for integration problems. For example, Copenhagen City Council member Hamid El Mousti cites ethnic minorities' widespread failure to learn Danish well as the key factor hindering their job prospects and enhancing their reliance on Denmark's generous welfare benefits. He and other Muslim leaders lament ethnic minorities' disproportionately high crime rate. A number of our contacts note that many immigrant parents fail to encourage their children to complete their education and that the high dropout rate among Muslim youths marginalizes them further from the highly competitive Danish job market.

Comment

¶12. (C) The Danish government so far has been more successful in restricting immigration than it has in promoting real integration among Denmark's diverse ethnic minority communities, particularly Muslims. Although the Danish nation has experienced immigration from Muslim regions for more than thirty years, by and large the concept of cultural pluralism is not one ascribed to by most Danes. Indeed, even though toleration, respect and open-mindedness can be said to be core Danish values, there also is a stubborn insistence on traditional form and custom. New arrivals, and even their children born in Denmark, who for whatever reason do not conform to cultural expectations are denigrated with the ultimate put down: "not Danish." In the politically charged environment that exists today, prospects for meaningful progress do not appear very encouraging. More likely, the cultural chasm between the largely homogeneous Danish population and the nearly four percent of the population who immigrated to Denmark is likely to remain, if not grow. That divide is more than just a political lightning rod for a seemingly perpetual national debate on Danish identity. The related social problems of unemployment, lack of education, and crime pose significant challenges to the Danish welfare state and test traditional Danish tolerance. Moreover, festering alienation from Danish society among Muslim youth provides a potential recruiting ground for religious extremists (Septel). Many Danes -- policymakers and ordinary citizens alike -- recognize that something has to be done. They just don't know what.

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